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DE RUEHGO #0223/01 0470538

ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 160538Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4139
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0655
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9443
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 3995
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1475
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3173
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6543
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4154
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0593
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0582
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2526
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0193
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000223

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2016

TAGS: PGOV CASC PREL BM

SUBJECT: BURMA'S DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER WANTS TO TALK

REF: RANGOON 213

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Classified By: CDA SVillarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Charge met February 14 with Deputy Foreign Minister Kyaw Thu at his request. Repeatedly emphasizing his interest in assisting Charge feel comfortable in Burma, he leisurely addressed a wide range of topics, including the problems of inadequate food and slow construction in Pyinmana; USG's plans to move to the new capital; and his willingness to advise Charge on security conditions for her in-country travels. Above all, he seemed pensive, as if he realized that something had changed, and he wasn't quite sure what had happened. End Summary.

BE CAREFUL OUT THERE

¶2. (C) Kyaw Thu during a social event a couple of weeks ago warned Charge against being "too aggressive" and urged Charge to meet with him for advice. So they met February 14, a meeting set up the day after we requested it. Expecting to be warned against asking to see Aung San Suu Kyi (reftel), Kyaw Thu instead began this meeting by recommending that Charge consult with him before traveling around the country, saying that he knew as an infantry officer that there were some dangerous parts of the country. He advised Charge to "go easy" on travel until accustomed to the country. The MFA had to refuse embassies and international agencies' requests for travel to certain areas for their security. Kyaw Thu described past kidnappings by insurgents of two Russian doctors and a Canadian couple, which resulted in concessions by Burmese authorities. He also noted the U.S. indictments of Wa drug traffickers, and speculated that the Wa would not hold an American captive for a prisoner exchange like the previous kidnappings and might chop his head off instead. He urged Charge to call ahead and discuss her in-country travel plans with him. She could accept his advice or not, but he wanted to ensure her safety. Charge mentioned her recent

travels and general destinations she would like to visit before the monsoon begins, none of which seemed to concern Kyaw Thu.

PYINMANA "NOT REALLY COMING TOGETHER"

¶3. (C) Charge asked whether the Foreign Ministry still planned to invite the diplomats to visit Pyinmana in April. Kyaw Thu replied that the visit might get postponed until May, depending on the state of construction. He said that the house intended for him in Pyinmana, promised for January, will probably not be ready for occupancy for another three or four months. So he must stay there in temporary dormitories without his wife. He complained about the separation saying his wife had always accompanied him on all his assignments, and especially because she always cooks for him. Even if the food was not very good, he would not complain if his wife prepared it. The new capital has not yet come together, he said, with the ongoing construction and inadequate food supplies. Even though the GOB orders food from Mandalay and Rangoon, fresh fruit, vegetables and poultry remain scarce. The existing supply just feeds the military assigned there. Unless the GOB has contingency plans, he doubted the civil servants would have enough food.

¶4. (C) In the meantime, Kyaw Thu said that MFA would keep a staff of 200 in Rangoon (out of 500 total), including protocol, administrative, and training officials. The upcoming visits of the Indian and Indonesian presidents would take place in Rangoon because "Pyinmana is not ready yet, and we are not anxious to receive them there." He also implied that the move had been poorly thought out, pointing out that the Transportation and Commerce Ministries had to leave officials behind in Rangoon to handle port and banking issues.

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¶5. (C) The Deputy Minister asked about USG construction of a new Embassy in Rangoon and plans for Pyinmana. Charge responded that we plan on moving into our new Embassy in 2007, and that it would be a long time before we could get funding for another embassy given the needs in many other countries. Kyaw Thu asked if the U.S. would need the five acre plot set aside for the U.S. in Pyinmana. Charge said that we would not reject it, but could not commit to building anything at this time. Kyaw Thu had surveyed other missions and reported that China requested a larger plot; Japan would need to get a new appropriation from the Diet, which could take time; and Laos had no money, but would lease property in Pyinmana if the GOB would build it.

ANDY CHAU

¶6. (C) Charge requested the Deputy Foreign Minister's assistance in arranging a meeting with the Home Affairs Minister regarding consular access to imprisoned Amcit Andy Chau. Despite repeated requests, and numerous discussions with the Foreign Ministry, we understood the Home Affairs Minister to be the chief obstacle to our gaining consular access. Kyaw Thu readily agreed to assist Charge, but cautioned her from beginning the meeting with the Home Affairs Minister by discussing Aung San Suu Kyi or the NLD. He suggested that she use the first meeting just to introduce herself. Charge said that she would at a minimum have to raise the issue of consular access to Chau since this had been pending for over six months.

SYMPATHY OF A PARIAH

¶7. (C) Kyaw Thu then talked at length about how speaking to foreigners, especially the U.S. Charge and British Ambassador, causes concern to some in the military and the government. He spoke of how bad he felt when people shied away from him when he served as Ambassador to South Africa and India because he represented Burma (his word choice.). He mentioned having pleasant relations with U.S. counterparts

overseas. He, therefore, took it upon himself to make sure no foreign diplomat here felt "mistreated" because of the official policies of their governments and indicated his willingness to provide "friendly advice" to Charge. He proclaimed that, unlike some ministers, he was not scared to meet with the U.S. and British diplomats, noting that he was due to retire soon anyway. Diplomats just follow policy instructions, he said. Some in the GOB hold the sanctions policies against foreign representatives here, just like some "hate" Burmese representatives overseas because of Than Shwe's policies. "We also perform our jobs according to policy instructions, but I'm not Than Shwe." Kyaw Thu continued, "In the future, things will change, and we will have a better relationship. Some want to push away the Westerners, but that is wrong, we should at least talk, even if we don't agree. We can't hate all Americans because of sanctions." So he and the Foreign Minister would stand up for what is right in engaging the diplomatic community, and Kyaw Thu would be okay if they fired him for that. Charge responded that she wanted to find a way forward and was willing to meet with all sides-authorities and opposition. She said the conditions to lift the sanctions were well-known, and when the GOB showed greater openness, we would respond. In the meantime, she agreed to meet regularly with Kyaw Thu to explore how we might be able to work cooperatively.

¶8. (C) Comment: Charge had been warned months ago by a lower-level Foreign Ministry official that Kyaw Thu was anti-Western. Kyaw Thu came alone to the meeting and seemed initially displeased that Charge was accompanied by a notetaker, but then he just started talking with no set agenda, leisurely moving from one topic to the next. We are the only Embassy that does not seek written approval from the

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Foreign Ministry to travel around the country. We have no plans to change, and Kyaw Thu did not request that. Instead, he seemed to be seeking sympathy in the guise of offering it.

We are far more popular here, fortunately, than Burmese diplomats in many countries overseas. Kyaw Thu repeatedly referred to his background as a military officer and his many years of sacrifice. Perhaps he has come to the realization that his service counts for nothing in a country ruled by Than Shwe. The move to Pyinmana without his wife may have been one sacrifice too many. The people have never supported this regime, but now it appears to be losing the support of those who thought they were part of the privileged few. End comment.

VILLAROSA